

Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: ENGR, BR
SUBJECT: NUCLEAR ISSUE - EXPOSE ON ANGRA-1 SAFETY

1. SUMMARY: IN A THREE-DAY SERIES BASED ON LEAKED GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS, MAJOR BRAZILIAN DAILY O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO HAS RAISED ISSUES OF SAFETY, ALLEGED SABOTAGE, AND GOB EFFORTS TO CONCEAL SAFETY PROBLEMS AT ANGRA-1 NUCLEAR REACTOR CONSTRUCTION SITE. GOB REACTIONS TO DATE HAS BEEN TO COMMEND THE NEWSPAPER FOR RAISING AN IMPORTANT ISSUE AND TO PROMISE CORRECTIVE ACTION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SERIES WAS BASED PRIMARILY ON LEAKED CLASSIFIED BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING THE FEDERAL POLICE REPORT, CONCERNING THE INVESTIGATION OF THE MAJOR FIRE AT THE ANGRA-1 CONSTRUCTION SITE ON OCTOBER 31, 1977. THE OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION CONCLUDED THAT THE FIRE WAS ACCIDENTAL, BUT IN THE COURSE OF REVIEWING THE SITUATION, RAISED NUMEROUS SAFETY ISSUES AND ALLEGATIONS OF SABOTAGE. ACCOMPANY-
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ING ARTICLES ACCUSED THE GOB NUCLEAR ESTABLISHMENT OF ATTEMPTING TO COVER UP THE SAFETY PROBLEMS AT ANGRA-1, AND CITED POLITICAL INFIGHTING REVOLVING AROUND THE GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN OF NUCLEBRAS PRESIDENT PAULO NOGUEIRA BATISTA TO SUPPLANT BRAZILIAN NATIONAL NUCLEAR ENERGY COMMISSION (CNEN) PRESIDENT HERVASIO DE CARVALHO AS THE KEY NUCLEAR AUTHORITY IN BRAZIL AS CONTRIBUTING TO MANY PROBLEMS PLAGUING THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM.

3. IN DEALING WITH THE ISSUE OF SABOTAGE, THE GOB INVESTIGATION CITED 71 SMALL FIRES OVER A FIVE-MONTH PERIOD, AS WELL AS SEVERAL CASES OF FALLING COUNTERWEIGHTS, PLUGGED PIPES, AND AN OIL-FILLED PRESSURIZED TRANSFORMER THAT WAS UNACCOUNTABLY DRAINED OF OIL AND FILLED WITH WATER. THERE WERE IN ADDITION NUMEROUS CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES FROM AMERICAN ENGINEERS AT ANGRA-1 AND GERMAN ENGINEERS AT ANGRA-II ACCUSING EACH OTHER OF SEEKING TO DELAY THEIR COMPETITOR'S PROJECTS. THE INVESTIGATION SHOWED THAT POLICE AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATING SECURITY AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE WERE EXTREMELY SENSITIVE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF US GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE OR SABOTAGE OF THE PROJECT, TO THE EXTENT OF QUESTIONING ONE ENGINEER AT SOME LENGTH BECAUSE HE INVITED AN UNNAMED AMERICAN PROFESSOR WHO HAD BEEN HIS TEACHER TO VISIT THE PROJECT. (COMMENT: THE ARTICLE WENT ON TO ERRONEOUSLY CLAIM THAT THE UNNAMED SCIENTIST SUBSEQUENTLY BECAME A "SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR" AT THE US EMBASSY IN BRASILIA. SCICOUNS HAS VISITED THE CONSTRUCTION SITE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, ALWAYS AT THE INVITATION OF SENIOR BRAZILIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM AUTHORITIES, AND HAS NEVER BEEN A TEACHER OF ANYONE INVOLVED IN THE BRAZILIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM). END COMMENT).

4. REGARDING COVER-UP CHARGES, THE SERIES REPORTED THAT IN EARLY MARCH 1978, SIX ENGINEERS ASSIGNED TO THE ANGRA-1 PROJECT HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO POLICE PRESSURES WHEN THEY DECLINED TO SIGN STATEMENTS PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF NUCLEBRAS CERTIFYING THAT THE HIGHEST INDUSTRIAL SAFETY STANDARDS WERE BEING APPLIED ON THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANGRA-1 PROJECT. ACCORDING TO THE GAZETA MERCANTIL OF MARCH 14, THE DOCUMENTS WERE TO BE USED DURING PRESIDENT GEISEL'S TRIP TO GERMANY. NUCLEBRAS PRESIDENT NOGUEIRA BATISTA IS IN LONDON ARRANGING FINANCING FOR URENCO ENRICHMENT SERVICES, AND HAS NOT COMMENTED ON THE CHARGE, ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN PARTIAL DENIALS FROM OTHERS ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED.

5. IN REACTING TO THE CHARGES THE BRAZILIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS AND CIRCUMSPECT, THE OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY COMMENDED O ESTADO FOR ITS "VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION," AND REPORTED THAT UPON READING OF THE CHARGES, PRESIDENT GEISEL ORDERED A FULL INVESTIGATION INTO SAFETY AT THE PROJECT. MINISTER OF MINES AND ENERGY SHIGEAKI UEKI HAS PROMISED A FULL INVESTIGATION AND REMEDIAL ACTION. OTHER REACTION FOLLOWS IN SEPTEL.

6. COMMENT: THE ANGRA-1 CONSTRUCTION PROJECT HAS BEEN KNOWN TO BE SOMEWHAT SLOPPY. WHETHER THE PRESS IS JUSTIFIED IN MAKING A CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS FACT AND THE ULTIMATE SAFETY OF THE ANGRA-1 REACTOR IS AN OPEN QUESTION, ALTHOUGH THE PRESS IS MAKING THE CONNECTION WITH A VENGEANCE. WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT THE OCTOBER 31 FIRE SUBSTANTIALLY DELAYED THE PROJECT, TO THE INTENSE EMBARRASSMENT OF NOGUEIRA BATISTA IN PARTICULAR. THE LEAK OF THE DOCUMENTS WAS PRESUMABLY

INTENDED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS EMBARRASSMENT, IN YET ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION OF THE INFIGHTING WITHIN THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM. ACCORDING TO THE GAZETA MERCANTIL OF MARCH 14, THE ESTADO OBTAINED THE DOCUMENTS AND DISCUSSED THEM WITH THE GOB AT LEAST A WEEK BEFORE PRESIDENT GEISEL'S TRIP TO GERMANY, BUT REFRAINED FROM PUBLICATION DURING THE TRIP. THE MODERATE GOVERNMENT REACTION TO THE CHARGES CAN THUS BE CONSIDERED THE RESULT OF CONSIDERABLE THOUGHT.

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